

Sue Williams

Serves you write, sweetheart

SOME people smash their cheating lover's CD collection in revenge. Some cut the arms off all their shirts. Some have been said to sew prawns into the hems of their clothes so that they'd be followed around by a mysterious, ghastly smell forever more.

But *Woman's Day* editor Bunty

Avieson last week retaliated in the classicst — and deadliest — way for her boyfriend going off with *60 Minutes* reporter Liz Hayes. She wrote a column in her magazine, wishing the cheating couple well.

You could almost feel the stilettos slipping between Liz Hayes' ribs.



Lost: polities with pizzazz

WATCHING Prime Minister John Howard trundling around Newcastle trying to pump up the economy with a few feeble gusts of hot air the other day, I couldn't help but long for the return of a true statesman or woman to centre stage.

Whatever your politics, you'd have to agree that Australia is being led into the brave new millennium by the most uninspiring pack of politicians we've had the bad luck to follow.

For a start there's Howard, who invokes as much passion as a plate of boiled carp. Then there's Opposition Leader Kim Beazley, who seems to have perfected the art of playing everything so low key he's all but disappeared behind locked office doors.

On the State scene, Bob Carr must have been last in line behind Peter Collins and Jeff Kennett when they handed out charisma chips.

Yet when you look at how many tiers of government Australia has, is it any wonder we're left with such a deadbeat bunch of political leaders?

With six State parliaments, each of which have both upper and lower houses — except Queensland — two representative councils in the ACT and Northern Territory, Federal upper and lower houses, and governors at the Federal level and for each State, both the good guys and bad guys are left terribly thin on the ground.

Just think: that's at least 15 governing bodies of politicians for a country of just 18 million people. Then, of course, there's that great wedge of local councils all to be stacked and shelved.

In short, we really shouldn't be all that surprised when we end up being led by a bunch of no-hopers, used-car salesmen and businesspeople who

would never have what it takes to make a lucrative living out in the real world.

The former Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev once bewailed that politicians promise to build a bridge even where there is no river. Ours wouldn't even have the nous to think of constructing a bridge over a torrent.

It almost makes you long for the days of Paul Keating, Bob Hawke and even Malcolm Fraser at a pinch. Sure, Keating never made himself very popular, but he did have a certain regal bearing, a charm (when he wanted to put it in gear) and a line in colourful invective that's sadly missed. History similarly might not judge Hawke too kindly, but he was tremendously charismatic in his day, dynamic and fun to be around.

Even Sir Joh was interesting. Perhaps his closest contemporary would be Pauline Hanson who, despite a similarly chaotic and stubbornly anachronistic thought process, has still nothing like his poetic zip. "The cupboard is not only bare," he once said of the Australian economy, "it has holes in it."

Hanson merely rants and rails in the drab, dismal language of someone who simply doesn't realise that Australia is in far more danger of drowning in a sea of mediocrity than in any imagined flood of Asians.

Even our political scandals are dull. They're all about omitting to fill in expense sheets or to declare interests, getting a leg-up for a business, or some other dry-as-ditch-dust disgrace. No three-in-a-bed romps or seedy sex shames here.

The answer must be to start scaling down our government. Only then can we hope to be entertained, amused and, oh yes, led by a set of women and men truly worthy of the task.

Holiday idea for the nuclear family

FORGET the Whitsundays. Forget Never. Never knowing about the Top End. Forget the jigsaw puzzle that just about sums up Victoria. Our latest tourist attraction is set to

be... the old British nuclear testing site of Maralinga.

They say radioactive contamination will be removed first, but I'm not convinced the dead corner of the Nullarbor

Plain will be flooded with visitors. Surely a holiday in the South Pacific, where we can see a bit of life before the French resume testing, would be a better bet.

Alex Mitchell on holidays.

JUSTICE ACTION GROUP SAYS WOMAN'S

EXCLUSIVE

By MARTIN WARNEMINDE

THE legal activist group which fought successfully for the release and acquittal of wrongly convicted Hilton Hotel bomber Tim Anderson has begun a campaign to win backpacker killer Ivan Milat a retrial.

Justice Action has set up a group called The Firm (Friends of Ivan Robert Milat) to reinvestigate the case.

It is headed by Ian "Makka" MacDougall who, for almost eight months, shared a Long Bay Remand Centre cell with Milat. It intends using protest meetings, newsletters and the Internet to promote its claim that Milat has been unfairly treated by the State's legal aid system and to make an appeal for new evidence.

The Firm already has made videotapes interviewing Milat family members, friends and a surprise outside witness, hairdresser Debbie Francis who owns a salon at Yamba on the far north coast.

On the tape, a copy of which has been supplied to *The Sun-Herald*, she describes how she was once engaged to a police constable, Adam Brook, who was stationed at Corramal, on the south coast.

Mrs Francis claimed two members of Task Force Air, which investigated the backpacker slayings, told her that her boyfriend was a suspect in the Belanglo State Forest killings on the nearby southern highlands.

This was after the 24-year-old constable was found shot dead with his service revolver in Corramal police station on Sunday, February 28, 1993.

Mrs Francis, who has since married a Yamba man, has supplied Milat's fighting force with a man's black leather jacket and a woman's gold wristwatch, which she claims were given to her as presents by her fiancé.

The Firm has a copy of a Task Force Air search warrant, listing a leather jacket owned by one of the six Belanglo victims, German backpacker Gabor Neugebauer. It was never found.

Mrs Francis said on the tape — and confirmed to *The Sun-Herald* — that she had twice phoned Crimestoppers telling them she had a jacket like the one they were looking for but the calls were not followed up.

Confirmation that Constable Brook was briefly a Belanglo suspect after his death came yesterday from an official police spokesman. Quoting Task Force Air officers, he said the officer was "merely one of a large number of people investigated".

Yesterday Constable Brook's father, Chief Inspector Dick Brook, the Corramal patrol commander at the time of the Belanglo investigation, confirmed his son's death had been investigated by Task Force Air "but only because of the fact of its timing". He said it was a natural thing to check if the suicide of any local police officer might have some connection with the investigation.

Chief Inspector Brook said he had heard "rumours" that his dead son's former fiancée was making allegations about his supposed role as a suspect in the slayings but had not got any confirmation when he questioned her about them.

"She was always simply as nice as pie," he said. "Hearing that this is all going to be made public has shocked me and my wife. We've nothing to hide and are still very upset by the circumstances of his death."

But as far as we are concerned the kid died of a broken



SUICIDE: Constable Adam Brook.

Backpacker murders:

Suicide cop in link to Milat

heart because Debbie was ending their relationship. To now have to put up with the monstrous slander of allegations that he was a Belanglo suspect has only revived our agony."

He dismissed allegations on the tape by Mrs Francis that his son had boasted to her he was once a teenage suspect in a search for a

connection to the case I am sure it would have been thoroughly checked out," he said.

Mrs Francis told *The Sun-Herald* she would be willing to repeat her story under oath.

"I just want the truth to come out," she said. "I'm not after anybody's hide."

She said she had contacted Justice Action with her story after failing to get a response from police. "The police suggested I was a bit dumb but there were too many circumstances that to me just didn't make sense."

"For example, when I rang Palazzi, who made the leather jacket, pretending I wanted a valuation so I could get it insured, I was switched to a woman who asked suspiciously if there was more to the story."

"When a girlfriend did the same thing a few months later, she got the same reaction. It made me wonder if Task Force Air detectives had been making inquiries at the company."

The Firm's first aim on Milat's behalf would be to demand appropriate legal aid funding to fight his appeal against the Belanglo convictions, Mr MacDougall said yesterday.

"At this stage we also believe

I just want the truth to come out

criminal known as the Bulli Rapist and had been asked to give a DNA sample to eliminate him.

"He was only 17 or 18 at that time," Chief Inspector Brook said. "Every kid in the area was a suspect. The one they eventually arrested and convicted lived only 200m from our house."

Chief Inspector Brook said he had supreme confidence that Task Force Air detectives had investigated every possible aspect of the Belanglo killings.

"For example, if the leather jacket she has produced had any